

Development Management Application Communication Protocol



Purpose

Cannock Chase District Council is committed to providing a Development Management service that is professional, consistent, transparent and focused on the timely determination of planning applications.

This Protocol sets out what applicants, agents, residents, consultees, councillors and other customers can expect from the Development Management service, and what the service expects from customers in return.

It also provides a clear approach for communication during the life of a planning application, particularly after validation and during the assessment stage. The aim is to reduce unnecessary chasing, improve consistency, manage expectations clearly, and allow officers to focus their time on progressing applications to decision.

Our Approach

Planning is a statutory public service carried out within a legal and policy framework. The Council recognises that planning applications, comments, objections and enquiries are important to those involved, and that delays or uncertainty can be frustrating.

Good customer care does not mean that the Council can provide continuous updates, enter into open-ended negotiations, or indicate likely outcomes before an assessment has been completed. It means communicating clearly, professionally and consistently about what the Council can do, what it cannot do, and when customers can expect to hear from us.

The Council will seek to:

- progress applications efficiently;
- make decisions as quickly as possible;
- ensure applications are properly assessed against planning policy and material considerations;
- communicate at key stages of the process;
- reduce repeated chasing and escalation;
- provide consistent messages across the service;
- treat customers professionally and respectfully.

Communication with Applicants and Agents

This includes, but is not limited to:

- validation correspondence;
- requests for further information;
- discussions in relation to amendments;
- extension of time requests;
- updates on application progress;
- clarification of issues arising during the assessment;
- withdrawal discussions, where appropriate;
- decision-related correspondence.

The Council will normally treat the appointed agent as the applicant's professional representative for the purposes of progressing the application. Applicants should therefore liaise directly with their agent for updates and advice on their application.

Where no agent has been appointed, correspondence will be undertaken directly with the applicant.

What Customers Can Expect from Us

Cannock Chase District Council will aim to:

- validate planning applications in accordance with the Council's validation requirements;
- explain clearly where an application is invalid and what is required to make it valid;
- acknowledge valid planning applications and confirm the target decision date;
- advise where applications are progressing towards decision within the expected timeframe;
- explain where additional time is required to complete the assessment;
- communicate clearly where amendments or additional information are required in accordance with the Council's approach to amendments;
- request extensions of time where these are necessary and justified;
- consider all comments received on planning applications as part of the assessment process;
- treat all customers professionally and respectfully, even where there is disagreement.

What the Council Cannot Do

The Council cannot:

- guarantee that all applications will be determined within statutory timescales, particularly where applications are complex, workloads are high, or external consultee responses are awaited;
- provide continuous progress updates throughout the life of an application;
- respond individually to repeated chasing enquiries;
- give an indication of the likely decision outcome before the assessment has been completed;
- debate the merits of live applications outside the formal planning process;
- respond individually to every comment, objection or question submitted on an application;
- provide professional planning advice outside the Council's pre-application advice service;
- enter into repeated rounds of negotiation or redesign during the application process.

What We Ask from Customers

The Council asks customers to:

- treat officers respectfully and professionally;
- submit complete and accurate information at the start of the process;
- ensure applications are supported by all necessary plans, documents and technical information;
- use the Council's website and public access system before contacting the service for updates;
- recognise that repeated chasing enquiries reduce the time officers have available to progress applications;
- work constructively within agreed timescales for amendments, additional information and extension of time requests;
- use the pre-application advice service where professional planning input is required before submission.

Applicants who appoint agents should ensure that their agent is authorised to correspond with the Council and keep them informed of progress.

Communication During the Application Process

The Council will focus on structured communication at key points in the application process, rather than responding to repeated requests for general progress updates.

The Council will normally contact the applicant or, where one has been appointed, the applicant's agent, at appropriate key stages. These may include:

- after validation;
- following the end of the consultation period;
- where the application is progressing to decision within the target timeframe;
- where an amendment or additional information is required;
- where an extension of time is required;
- where an essential consultee response remains outstanding;
- where the application is likely to proceed to determination;
- where withdrawal may be offered as an option in appropriate circumstances.

No Early View on Decision Outcomes

Officers will not normally indicate whether an application is likely to be approved or refused before the assessment has been completed and the formal decision has been issued.

This is because planning applications must be assessed fully and properly against relevant planning policies, consultation responses, representations and other material considerations.

The only exception may be where an officer considers, following assessment and internal review where appropriate, that an application is likely to be refused and that the applicant may wish to consider withdrawal. Even in those circumstances, the Council will make clear that this is not an opportunity to enter into further negotiation or submit repeated amendments.

Chasing and Progress Updates

The Council understands that customers may wish to receive updates on applications. However, repeated chasing enquiries can significantly reduce the time available for officers to progress applications and issue decisions.

The Council will therefore normally communicate at key stages, rather than responding to repeated requests for general updates.

Where a customer repeatedly seeks progress updates, the Council may advise that:

- the application remains under assessment;
- the customer will be contacted when there is a substantive update;
- repeated requests for updates will not speed up the process;
- further chasing enquiries may not receive an individual response.

Amendments, Additional Information and Extensions of Time

Where an application requires a minor amendment or limited additional information to allow it to progress, the case officer will normally contact the applicant's agent, where one has been appointed.

The Council may request an extension of time where:

- amendments are required;
- additional information is needed;
- consultation responses are outstanding;
- further assessment is necessary;
- committee consideration or legal agreement is required;
- other matters outside the case officer's control prevent determination within the original target date.

Where amendments are requested, the Council will normally set a clear deadline. If the information is not received within the required timescale, the application may proceed to determination based on the information already submitted.

Withdrawal of Applications

In some cases, where an application is likely to be refused, the Council may offer the applicant or their agent the opportunity to withdraw the application before a formal decision is issued.

The Council will make clear that withdrawal is optional. If the application is not withdrawn by the deadline provided, the Council may proceed to determine the application.

An offer to withdraw should not be treated as an opportunity to reopen negotiations, submit further amendments, or redesign the proposal.

Continuous Improvement

The Development Management service will continue to review and improve its systems, processes and communication practices.

This Protocol is intended to support a service that is:

- open;
- professional;
- consistent;
- realistic;
- focused on timely decision-making;
- clear about what customers can expect.

It does not guarantee that every customer will receive the outcome or timescale they want. However, it does provide a clear commitment that the Council will communicate consistently, manage expectations honestly and continue working to improve the service.